



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

LYNDO TIPPETT
SECRETARY

**North Carolina Board of Transportation
Environmental Planning and Policy Committee
Meeting Minutes for April 30, 2003**

A meeting of the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee (EPPC) was held on April 30, 2003 at 8:00 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building. Nina Szlosberg chaired the meeting. Other Board of Transportation members that attended were:

Tom Betts	Frank Johnson
Conrad Burrell	Cam McRae
Marion Cowell	Nina Szlosberg
Nancy Dunn	Alan Thornburg

Other attendees included:

David Allsbrook	Julie Hunkins	Sec. Bill Ross
Christie Barbee	David Hyder	Ruth Sappie
Dempsey Benton	Berry Jenkins	Roger Sheats
Donnie Brew	Fred Lamar	Roy Shelton
Craig Deal	Don Lee	Jay Swain
Catherine Dunn	Robin M. Little	Greg Thorpe
B.E. Eatmon Jr.	Carl McCann	Lyndo Tippet
C.A. Gardner	Ehren Meister	Don Voelker
Cherie Gibson	Mike Mills	Ron Watson
Lisa Glover	Sarah Mitchell	Marcus Wilner
Gail Grimes	Jon Nance	Teresa Wyatt
Rob Hanson	Meg Ryan O'Donnell	
Mike Holder	Allen Pope	

Ms. Szlosberg called the meeting to order. The meeting minutes were approved as presented.

Ms. Szlosberg opened the meeting by announcing that the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have together been awarded with the Federal Highway Administration's Environmental Excellence Award for Environmental Leadership. This award is a prestigious recognition and was presented at a special Earth Day ceremony in Washington, D.C. Those presented the award were DOT Secretary Lyndo Tippet, DOT Deputy Secretary Roger Sheats, DENR Secretary Bill Ross and DENR Deputy Secretary Dempsey Benton.

The national award was presented by Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters and specifically recognized the two departments' unprecedented partnership to deliver transportation projects while improving North Carolina's environment. This award is part of FHWA's Biennial awards program and honors those partners, projects and processes that excel in meeting growing transportation needs while protecting and enhancing the environment. The Environmental Leadership Award recognizes outstanding transportation projects, processes and people who incorporate environmental stewardship into their transportation programs. NCDOT and DENR were specifically recognized for their successful partnership based on responsible and timely transportation decision-making and mutual support for environmental stewardship. Some of the major initiatives and accomplishments recognized by the award include:

- The process improvements in environmental permitting and wetland, stream and buffer mitigation processes
- The creation of the nationally-recognized Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP)
- The establishment of a formal dispute resolution procedure
- The DOT Funded Position Program
- The River Basin Signing Program
- The development of Basinwide Restoration Plans
- The Air Quality Roundtable
- The acquisition of a 2,500 acre habitat in Hoke County and a 9,732 acre habitat in Tyrell County to preserve the federally-endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker
- The partnership purchase of Bird Island
- The purchase of view sheds along the Blue Ridge Parkway

Ms. Szlosberg congratulated the departments' combined efforts and welcomed the four recipients to the meeting.

Secretary Tippet commented on the importance of this award and noted that North Carolina is one of the national leaders in the environmental area. Secretary Ross further noted that it is important to build upon this award and continue to make the transportation system more efficient and ecologically effective. One key initiative that has enormous potential is the Ecosystem Enhancement Program. Secretary Ross particularly recognized Roger Sheats and Dempsey Benton for their leadership and exemplary relationship.

Ms. Szlosberg opened the next agenda topic by introducing a short video that describes Governor Easley's initiative *One North Carolina Naturally*. This initiative, launched a few weeks ago, identifies the importance of North Carolina's natural environment and is a component of the Governors broader platform of *One North Carolina*. Following the video, DENR Secretary Ross was introduced to present the objectives of *One North Carolina Naturally*.

Secretary Ross began by stating that the purpose of *One North Carolina Naturally* is to reframe the purpose of conservation within North Carolina. There are many good discussions occurring in statewide organizations to advance the idea of conservation. There is a sense that the remaining open spaces within NC are being fragmented or converted, which is having an impact on our natural world and the services that are provided from it. He notes that the level of development and sprawl is taking place at a faster pace than our conservation efforts and there is a need to assess the gaps that are occurring. It is inevitable that we find a way to responsively react to the disparities identified to protect our natural environment and future 50 and 100 years from now. Secretary

Ross commented that the notion of this initiative can be characterized in a quote from Pat Noonan of The Conservation Fund, “The only thing worse than haphazard development is haphazard conservation.” This quote suggests that conservation efforts should be coordinated, integrated and made the most efficient and effective possible.

One North Carolina Naturally has several key pieces.

- To broaden and deepen the level of conservation efforts within the state.
- To use the power of Geographic Information Systems as a way to focus, coordinate and integrate conservation efforts.
- To undertake these efforts by adding value to any of the efforts already underway.

The end result is that conservation should be coordinated between agencies and organizations (such as DOT and DENR) and integrated as much as possible.

Secretary Ross gave an explanation on how this initiative will broaden over time, as well as described that the current conservation efforts are fragmented and varied. A traditional view would be to ask, “How many parks do we need to be able to accommodate the growing population of the state?”. Another way to look at the same issue would be to ask, “What network of natural systems (owned publicly and privately) do we need for our children and grandchildren need to survive, live healthy lives, and to prosper economically?”. A key point of this initiative is stimulate our collective efforts to meet the social, economic and environmental needs of the public without negatively impacting future needs. An emphasis is now being placed on a broader, statewide approach.

The Million Acres Program, aimed at increasing the protected state land in NC, is the starting point for this initiative. Secretary Ross explained how this initiative, created in a previous administration, will be built upon by adding conservation of private lands. This will allow us to focus on the intent of all lands and to utilize different financial resources. Another way of expanding our conservation efforts is to expand the protection of North Carolina’s coastal areas and sounds. Human impact has played a visible role in negatively impacting our precious coastal resources. The agencies with authority can come together to develop plans for protection of certain habitats and resources. Another key perspective of this initiative is to encourage our citizens to volunteer and individually conserve our natural environment. This initiative is by no means a regulatory one. However, there is a need to refocus efforts from a regulatory basis to an incentive and assistance based effort.

Secretary Ross referred to a map that has been created to integrate the current protected lands in NC. This map, the first known map of its kind in the state, will be the beginning of a strategic plan that will identify where the conservation needs are. The plan will identify how all the organizations involved, including DOT, can make adjustments and decisions for conservation purposes. This initiative will allow us to meet the needs of our future and add value to our current efforts. An example of this is the joint effort with the Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP). The EEP uses compensatory mitigation for highway construction to enhance the environment. There are currently a lot of questions circulating about how highways get permitted and whether it can be done better. The Environmental Excellence Award is an example of how the two departments are working together to address these types of questions.

Board Member Tom Betts asked if there was any one common problem that is encountered during permitting and what can NCDOT do to expedite the process. Secretary Ross replied that there are three ways that would be very beneficial.

- 1) To exchange ideas on how the project development and permitting process are working and to regularly and openly discuss issues.
- 2) To support the Ecosystem Enhancement Program as it moves forward. The EEP addresses the issues that NCDOT has identified as those which lead to projects with increased cost and delayed construction. This change to the EEP will be slow because of the complexity associated with the EEP and because it is a new process. However, support by the Board for the EEP would help, and Secretary Ross encouraged Board members to become familiar with the EEP.
- 3) To support the idea of “express permitting.” This wasn’t necessarily created for highway projects but is the concept that a specific deadline would be identified to bring the decision-makers together to make a decision on the permitting in a particular timeframe. This could ultimately speed up the permitting process for certain projects. This concept is currently in the legislature and waiting funding approval.

In addition to these three ideas, DENR is always looking for good ideas. Secretary Ross thanked the Board for allowing him to talk about the initiative *One North Carolina Naturally*.

Ms. Szlosberg announced a special guest to the committee meeting, Dr. Oyun . Dr. Oyun is part of the Eisenhower Fellowship Program. This program was established in General Eisenhower’s honor to promote international understanding and leadership. The fellowship program singles out various leaders throughout the world to travel, educate and learn about global issues. Dr. Oyun is a member of the Mongolian Parliament and is only one of four opposition members in the 76-member parliament. She is a member of several standing committees and parliamentary groups and many people feel she is in line to become Mongolia’s Prime Minister. Her doctorate is in isotope geochemistry and she entered Mongolian politics following the assassination of her brother who was the Minister for Infrastructure Development and one of Mongolia’s top pro-democracy leaders. She will be spending time in North Carolina visiting the legislature and other groups.

Ms. Szlosberg introduced Julie Hunkins, Director of NCDOT’s Office of Environmental Quality, to update the committee on the Southern Environmental Leadership Summit being hosted by NCDOT on May 19-21 in Raleigh. Ms. Hunkins stated that the purpose of the summit is to promote environmental leadership including environmental stewardship and streamlining, discuss how to create an environmental ethic within agencies, and to identify best environmental practices from transportation agencies. The conference will begin at 1:00 PM on Monday, May 19 and will end at noon on Wednesday May 21 and will be held downtown Raleigh at the Sheraton. Evening events are also scheduled for the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and Exploris.

Everyone was invited to participate in the conference, but generally participants will include transportation professionals from the Federal Highway Administration, state transportation agencies, and partners from environmental resources agencies. The three-day summit has daily themes and presentations. Day one will include topics about environmental stewardship and streamlining. Day two will involve topics about cultural and organizational dynamics and specific technical issues. Day three will include technical discussions and an overall closing discussion with emerging issues.

NCDOT was asked to host this conference because of our national leadership in the environmental stewardship and streamlining arena. Many North Carolina projects, programs, and initiatives will be highlighted at the conference including such topics as GIS and Archaeological Predictive Modeling, Contest Sensitive Solutions, the EEP, Rural Planning Organizations, Indirect and Cumulative Impacts, and the NEPA/404 Merger Process, to name a few. Many special guests have been invited to attend including Governor Easley and FHWA Administrator Mary Peters. Registration has closed, however, if there are any Board Members that would like to attend that have not yet registered, please see Julie Hunkins for registration information. Ms. Szlosberg concluded by noting the hard work that has been put into planning this conference and that she believes the event will be very worthwhile.

The next meeting for the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, June 4, 2003 at 8:00 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building.

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